

Notes on Feminism and Film (1) - Working Paper in Cultural Studies

Sexism affects literature at three levels, of which the easiest to detect is criticism. The bias of a critic may be clearly seen when he makes judgements based upon sexist preconceptions. It is also apparent that some male writers impose sexist views of female psychology upon the characters they create, but to perceive this second level of sexism may require the reader to challenge the implicit assumptions within a work of art. The most subtle, pervasive level at which sexism affects literature, however, is that of literary convention. The treatment and fate of the heroine, for example, may be controlled by conventions that inherently impose a sexist view on the author and the reader, male or female: they may affect the way an author treats his heroine, and constitute the reason why readers will find her acts credible and her fate acceptable. These conventions, in effect, reflect the values of the culture, and still need to be defined and analysed.

Marcia Lieberman, Images of Women in Fiction (2)

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We are looking at two texts on Dance Girl Dance (3) - both working with (arguably) established theoretical approaches (Kay and Peary's more traditional than the Arzner pamphlet's). Their common project - to produce critical writing on the film from a feminist point of view - their occasional similarities, as well as their differences, enable us to consider some elements of the framework of questions:

- how does patriarchy operate in cultural production?
- how does it operate in criticism/theory?
- how does feminism judge cultural objects?
- what critical approaches are appropriate to feminist analysis?
- how does feminism create its own cultural objects?

These questions underlie the following notes - which are notes because the area is a relatively new one and its points of contact with existing practice in film production and theory are only just beginning to be defined (4).

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Feminism and Criticism

The issue of feminism and criticism is not one which involves a conflict of critical methods but of their practice. The methods themselves may be usable by feminist critics but their practice by non-feminists may be sexist. A feminist reading does not mean applying a specific theoretical model, rather it is an approach, through whatever theory, which stems from a feminist perspective. Its intervention in film criticism now is problematic but no more so than that made by any other new ideological concern. And as with other ideological interventions, making a feminist analysis of anything requires a commitment to, and not just a passing interest in, feminism. This does not mean that there is a single feminist reading of a film, though obviously a feminist critic, as any other, would want to make that claim for her/his reading. A primary concern

of this paper, then, is to look at the two texts on Dance Girl Dance and make some comments on them, in this context.

#### Kay and Peary

The article begins by saying "Ms Arzner deserves feminist recognition." and substantiates this by claiming:

Arzner's films document the lives of women at all phases of consciousness, wrestling for love, career, independence, and integrity. (5)

And this view, of Arzner's view as it were, is taken to the film which is then seen as being centrally

... the saga of a child-like woman (Judy O'Brien) growing up, mastering fantasy and self-doubt to achieve a dearly desired career as a modern ballerina. (6)

Everything in the film is then seen as relating to this central theme, which is supported by another theme - trying again (7). There are other elements of critical theory in the article than the one on which this view of the film is based - authorship - but this is a useful one for us to look at in terms of feminism and criticism.

#### Authorship

The notion of authorship, traditionally one which in criticism separated great artists (of literature, drama, painting etc) from lesser ones, was similarly used in film criticism. It was taken up by the critics of Cahiers du Cinéma and applied to American films, which had until then, with very few exceptions, been dismissed as not art. Auteurism was very important in the development of film theory because of its opening up of the area of Hollywood cinema. But it also had severe limitations - as shown in Alan Lovell's useful discussion of the practice of auteurism (8) - principally the tendency to define an auteur's world-view through his\* concern with philosophical insight:

The artist is seen as providing the same kind of insights as the philosopher, the prophet or the social thinker. (9)

Thus the limitation is in the critic's view of the director as the only controlling factor in the film's production. And while it would be useful, in our building up of knowledge about a film, to see it as part of a body of work of which one factor (and it could be that the body of work is all the films directed by one person) is the director, but other factors include the production company, the formal conventions of the time, other films in the genre of which it is part, etc. Arzner made films for different studios, worked with male camera operators as well as women editors and writers, and was influenced by other films of the period. She did not simply have a view of the world which her films then reflected; she was making films within an established production framework - Hollywood.

To extend this to women artists and auteurism, and to consider whether women could be considered to be auteurs we have to look at the kind of films which were picked up by critics in this context. In its concern for philosophical insight much auteurism (ie that for which the preceding description is a fair one) also, by implication, supported patriarchal culture. That is, auteur criticism saw philosophical insight in the author's view of the world, and this was judged by its weight, in terms of content and form, and its individuality - a true film auteur was someone "who brings something genuinely personal to his subject":

Instead of merely transforming someone else's work faithfully and self-effacingly, the auteur transforms the material into an expression of his own personality. (10)

Thus, since auteurism has been criticised for its individualism, anyone who is a feminist must make a direct link between the feminist view of the world as being male-centred and individualist and the reflection of that in auteur writing. There is nothing inherently sexist in an auteur approach then, but if patriarchy informs cultural products, and auteur critics praise films which are 'insightful' they are by implication endorsing that situation within the world and within culture, and not criticising it. It is useful at this point, perhaps, to illustrate this argument by example: firstly, Peter Wollen writing on Hawks in general, and secondly, Robin Wood writing on Rio Bravo in his book on Hawks.

Hawks stands opposed, on the one hand, to John Ford and, on the other hand, to Budd Boetticher. All these directors are concerned with the problem of heroism. For the hero, as an individual, death is an absolute limit which cannot be transcended: it renders life which preceded it meaningless, absurd. How then can there be any meaningful action during life? How can individual action have any value - be heroic - if it cannot have transcendent value, because of the absolutely devaluing limit of death? ... Besides the covert pressure of the crowd outside, there is also an overt force which threatens: woman. Man is woman's 'prey'. Women are admitted to the male group only after much disquiet and a long ritual courtship, phased round the offering, lighting and exchange of cigarettes, during which they prove themselves worthy of entry. Often they perform minor feats of valour. Even then though they are never really full members. (11)

In fairness to both (all?) writers it has to be said that when the pieces were written feminism was at a very early stage. The point is not to attack them for sexism but to show that it exists. Wollen's essay is, like Lovell's, a critique of auteurism, and Hawks is taken as a test case. We can learn from it because the essay does describe the position of women within the work, but we need to take it further; although Wollen considers the problems of auteurism these do not include the problem of women in the text and how the text - formally, as well as thematically - resolves it. Robin Wood, in his discussion of the John Wayne/Angie Dickinson characters in Rio Bravo, sees an element of play on the archetypal male hero but then argues that this proves the validity of the hero. The hero, John T Chance (Wayne) is strong, silent, infallible; the character embodies moral integrity, independence and self-sufficiency. Wood suggests that this is "pushed to an extreme that verges on parody" but "this has the effect of testing the validity of the values the persona embodies by exposing them to the possibility of ridicule" (12). In other words the values are the more strongly proven by the ability of the character to withstand possible ridicule. And the high-point of maturity within the film is the suggested securing of the relationship between Chance and Feathers (Angie Dickinson):

She has to take the initiative throughout their relationship; but ... its development is repeatedly given impetus by her attempts to drive him to establish authority over her, thereby completing his mastery of his world. Feathers, in fact, trains Chance ... for a relationship of spiritual equals, for it is always clear that the establishment of male authority will be a matter of voluntary

surrender on her part. ... the relationship reached at the end of Mio Bravo carries a beautiful and satisfying sense of maturity, with both partners strong enough to preserve a certain independence and to come together on terms of equality. Again, it is a relationship of free people, each existing from an established centre of self-respect. (13)

Hopefully it is clear from this quotation that criticism which sees the world in terms of mature heterosexual relationships and the notion of spiritual equality based on "voluntary surrender" to the "establishment of male authority" is sexist. Wollen's essay does not endorse this but doesn't question it either.

The suggestion here is that auteur critics are only interested in films in which there is a central male protagonist enacting the male-centre of the author's world which itself reflects the same world view of the critic. What about the films made by auteurs in which women figure largely? One would like to suggest that there are very few in which women are protagonists; they are more likely to similarly reflect the author's/critic's implicit view of the world as male-centred (14). The films which do tend to be excluded in auteur criticism are those which are centrally concerned with issues of interest to women not men. Again, here it is perhaps useful to give an example.

In 1959 Claude Chabrol wrote an article in which he argued that in the end there was no difference between big themes and little themes, but that in the minds of most people a difference did exist. He gave examples - those on the left are the big themes, those on the right the little ones:

the French Revolution	a quarrel with next-door neighbours
the apocalypse of our time	the barmaid who gets herself pregnant
the final hours of a hero	an inquiry into the murder of a prostitute (15)
of the Resistance	

The point is a useful one which supports the arguments of Lovell and Wollen. It would also appear to contradict the point made above about the kind of films in which auteurism has no interest. But Chabrol goes on to give two hypothetical scenarios to support his argument.

The Apocalypse of Our Time. Scenario: After a total atomic war, life has disappeared from the face of the earth. The sole survivor is a Negro, all alone in New York. He organises his life as best he can, but suffers from loneliness. After a couple of months he realises that another human being, a white woman, has survived the catastrophe. He meets her. Soon he falls in love with her, but his racial complexes make happiness impossible for him. Two months later, a white man appears in a dinghy. He too wants the woman. At first the Negro acts self-effacingly, then he reacts and challenges the other man. The white man decides on a duel to the death, and in the deserted city, in front of the United Nations building, the two last men on earth throw themselves into the final struggle. For it is, of course, war, man's folly, that is the 'apocalypse of our time'.

The Quarrel Between Neighbours. Scenario: In an isolated part of the Causses, a poor farmer lives alone. He has organised his life as best he can, but he suffers from loneliness. One day, another human being, a woman from the city, appears. Her car has broken down. She yields to the charms of the countryside. The farmer does her the honours of the house and shows her his primitive life on the land. Soon he falls in love with her, but his peasant status, compared with her status as city-dweller, makes happiness impossible for him. A little later, a former farmer, who has lived in the city for some time, decides to return to the land. He settles down on the neighbouring farm, and soon he wants the woman. To start with, the first farmer acts self-effacingly; then he reacts and challenges the other man, who thereupon decides on a duel to the death. In the desolate wind-swept Causses, in the shadow of the wild Cévennes mountains, the two men fight. For it is, of course, true that farmers enjoy a 'good quarrel with their neighbour'. (16)

If we look at the themes on the left above it is possible to suggest that they are located in the world, within history, within culture; those on the right are located in the personal, in the home and outside history. But even when he argues against the difference in thematic concerns and indicates how one theme is much like another he still places the woman in the story in a secondary position. The action takes place around her; it is admittedly sparked off by her, but it is the men who decide that and how the matter will be resolved. The woman is only defined as the object they both want.

In terms of the Kay and Peary text, this argument raises questions about the validity of their seeing Arzner as an author outside the framework of Hollywood - ie as somehow separate from its influences; and about their reading of the film through a woman as central protagonist. Firstly it is almost certainly true to say there has never been a woman director who was considered an auteur; for one reason there have been very few women directors at all, so to try to make an auteur in the sense described above out of the work of the only woman director to be working in the 30s and early 40s ignores her uniqueness and the problems of being in that position. Secondly it tries to establish a central heroine without recognising the conventional role of heroines within a narrative (to which we shall return) as different from that of heroes. Heroes are conventionally characters who win through to victory over whatever problem is set them by the plot; can one really say that Judy wins through in the same way? In order for her to become a dancer she has to learn to accept the authority of Steve Adams over her.

A final point, here, about the Kay and Peary text. In many ways it is critically eclectic without acknowledging its use of different critical methods, so that psychological realism (the following through the narrative of a central character seen as reflecting real-life) is mixed with structuralism (the chart and the introduction of Lévi-Strauss) and fairy-tales, and finally with genre criticism. These different critical elements need to be treated as such within the text and our reading of it.

#### Johnston and Cook

The critical concepts employed by Claire Johnston and Pam Cook emerge from the post '68 critical concerns of Cahiers du Cinéma: problems of history as chronology (as opposed to a process that relates to contemporary struggles), an Althusserian notion of ideology, and, in

addition, psychoanalysis. These theoretical developments were also, of course, products within patriarchal culture. As with auteurism feminist critics need to assess whether they can be utilised in a feminist reading of a film - in other words whether they produce useful knowledge about a film for feminists. Johnston and Cook do not appear to raise this question.

Claire Johnston has taken from Cahiers du Cinéma (17) the notion of a category of Hollywood films which though apparently representing the dominant beliefs of American society were actually making a criticism of them from within the film. Thus in All That Heaven Allows (Sirk 1956) - a film and a director both fitting, in traditional criticism terms, into the genre of 'women's weepies', a genre never taken seriously either then or by genre criticism now, and of which Stella Dallas is also an example - the apparent story of middle-class life whose equilibrium is disturbed and then restored by the end of the film, is, at the same time, disturbed in such a way as to make the resolution of the ending doubtful. In other words the disturbance which is resolved in terms of the film actually goes beyond the film and is a reflection on the values in society on which the disturbance and the resolution are based. The film is not just about the problem of a middle-class widow wanting to marry a younger and socially 'inferior' man, but at the same time seriously questions the social belief system which makes that situation a problem. This "internal criticism of the dominant ideology" is seen to operate through a "hierarchy of discourses", and to operate both in terms of content and of form (18). In other words the automatic assumption that the widow of one of the town's respected members will, in honour of his status in the town - and thus of the town's moral status - maintain that status by being his widow for the rest of her life, is not just temporarily jolted by her, say, having a fling or a minor breakdown, but is severely jolted because she is asserting her right to sexuality (ie outside the maternal function invested in her by the nuclear American family). And this is such a strong jolt that it points up the hypocrisy of that assumption which is thus suggested to be built on inadequate sexual relations and false social status.

The notion of dominant (patriarchal) ideology being questioned is then applied to Arzner, and most clearly in Dance Girl Dance in the scene where Judy turns on the burlesque hall audience, which thus affects a contradiction of the assumption that it is natural for women to be treated as spectacle. Judy is seen to temporarily displace the central male voice (embodied in Steve Adams ever-near presence and the burlesque audience and, to an extent, in the patronising judge) and to attempt to assert her own. She rejects Steve Adams' attempted pick-up but at the end of the film accepts him as the master of her future; she turns on the audience but then the audience claps her 'performance'.

Pam Cook more specifically employs psychoanalysis in her essay and sees this theoretical framework as more productive than that used by Claire Johnston:

While there is no doubt that there are progressive elements in many Hollywood films (for example, those of Sirk or Ford) which posit the idea of female desire, nevertheless ultimately these films operate a closure on the possibilities of the working through of this desire (ie of articulating and satisfying desire through phantasy). The films of Dorothy Arzner are important in that they foreground precisely this problem of the desire of women caught in a system of

representation which allows them at most the opportunity of playing on specific demands that the system makes on them. (19)

What Pam Cook sees in Arzner's films is a number of "strategies" - gags, narrative reversals, irony, play with stereotypes - which interrupt the flow of the film and thereby foreground

the contradiction between women's desire for self-expression and culture, and the cultural processes which articulate a place for woman as spectacle. (20)

In some sense seeing the film in terms of the desire of woman being asserted during the film could be equated with the reading of Kay and Peary. The difference between their two uses of that (apart from the latter being used in its common-sense way and the former being used in the more specific psychoanalytic sense) is indicated by Pam Cook:

The value of the film lies not in its creation of a culture-heroine with whom we can finally and fully identify, but in the ways in which it displaces identification with the characters and focuses our attention on the problematic position they occupy in their world. (21)

This difference is very important and the point made by Pam Cook here is also one this paper would wish to support.

So one of the concerns of feminist film criticism is to analyse how patriarchy confirms itself through criticism/theory rather than to try to insert women into its hierarchy. We must be aware of the historical and cultural determinants of films we look at and understand how they effect the product. Then we can begin to establish theoretical approaches which are, if not asexual, aware of sexual difference and which strive against sexism. The project then is to work from a feminist position through the cultural products and critical theories of patriarchy:

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One afternoon, at the Alte Pinakothek in Munich, we stopped in front of Boucher's Reclining Girl. She is lying on her belly, naked, her elbows supporting the upper part of her rosy body and her legs spread wide apart. My husband looked for a moment and observed with mock pedantry, 'Ah yes, a nude of the turn-her-over-and-fuck-her school'. But I didn't want to turn her over and fuck her. Nor did I want to compete with her candid sexuality. What I felt was her exposure and vulnerability - and I felt that I shared them. We were both supposed to believe that this portrait of a teenaged mistress of Louis XV 'is a triumph of simple and memorable design, and shows Boucher's delight in the sheer painting of flesh'.

Anonymous (22)

Sexuality is a central issue in much of Western art and literature, and women have often been prominent among the consumers of culture; nevertheless, criticism has rarely recognised that their experience might make women interpret art differently from men. ... criticism has denied the existence of a gender point of view or, where it has acknowledged it, dismissed the female one as peculiar, marginal and subjective. (23)

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Narrative, convention and socialisation

In an essay which appears in the same collection as Marcia Lieberman's, Joanna Russ takes some well known stories and changes the sex of the central character. (24):

A young girl in Minnesota finds her womanhood by killing a bear.

An English noblewoman, vacationing in Arcadia, falls in love with a beautiful, modest young shepherd. But duty calls; she must return to the court of Elizabeth I to wage war on Spain. Just in time the shepherd lad is revealed as the long-lost son of the Queen of a neighbouring country; the lovers are united and our heroine carries off her husband and lad-in-waiting to the King of England. (25)

A phosphorescently doomed poetess sponges off her husband and drinks herself to death, thus alienating the community of Philistines and businesswomen who would have continued to give her lecture dates. (26)

A young man who unwisely puts success in business before his personal fulfilment loses his masculinity and ends up as a neurotic, lonely eunoch.

On one level, as Joanna Russ suggests, these stories just don't work when the sex is reversed because they are stories for heroes and not for heroines - thus the plot possibilities for men and women are different, and different solely on the basis of sex. On another level, though one or two might work there would necessarily be changes but the plot produced would suggest deviancy. To suggest that sex reversal within a narrative is possible would be to suggest that plots are pure inventions, and not related in any way to a cultural and social context. It is rather the case in fact, Joanna Russ continues, that

Authors do not make their plots up out of thin air ... writers ... are pretty much restricted to the attitudes, the beliefs, the expectations, and above all the plots, that are 'in the air' - 'plot' being what Aristotle called mythos; and in fact it is probably most accurate to call these plot-patterns myths. They are dramatic embodiments of what a culture believes to be true - or what it would like to be true - or what it is mortally afraid may be true. (27)

Thus art, literature - and criticism - exist to socialise people into the roles defined by the culture in which they live. In western culture, as we have seen, roles are defined in relation to patriarchy. We could cite again here the responses to Bouher's Reclining Girl. And if we take as another example the first and the last stories quoted above we can ask why does a young girl conventionally not in fact find her womanhood in killing bears - or in other such feats - but in a man and/or marriage (cf the last story); and - in looking at the last story why does a man conventionally not in fact lose his masculinity if he puts success in business before personal fulfilment. And the reason is precisely that a man's personal fulfilment is seen primarily in success in work whereas a woman's personal fulfilment is seen in terms not of work but in terms of a man and/or marriage.

The male-defined cultural view of the role of woman is of a non-central position in the action of a plot and as an 'other' to the central male

protagonist - as we saw in the earlier quotations from Wood and Chabrol.

#### Narrative, convention and stereotype

What we have in fact is a series of stereotypes whose function is to serve the main point of the story - modest maidens, wicked temptresses, pretty schoolmarm's - and spinsterly ones - beautiful bitches, faithful wives ... We need to be able to identify stereotypes and to see how they are shaped by the narrative conventions. Before we go back to Dance Girl Dance it is also useful to make some comment about European art cinema which is often claimed not to stereotype women. Indeed Bergman and Truffaut have both been seen as contributing 'positive' images of women to film history. Le Bonheur (Agnes Varda 1965) is a useful film to consider in this respect since it is by a woman, but also because although it doesn't have a central woman character it concerns a family situation.

Le Bonheur is described by Moy Armes as remaining in the memory

as a film full of flowers and sunlight... the film begins with a summer picnic which is the perfect picture of happiness and ends with an autumnal one in which the replacement of wife by mistress is the only alteration. (28)

- a very different view of the film from that of Claire Johnston:

Varda's portrayal of female fantasy constitutes one of the nearest approximations to the facile day-dreams perpetuated by advertising that probably exists in the cinema. Her films appear totally innocent to the workings of myth; indeed it is the purpose of myth to fabricate an impression of innocence, in which all becomes 'natural': Varda's concern for nature is a direct expression of this retreat from history: history is transmuted into nature, involving the elimination of all questions, because all appears 'natural'. There is no doubt that Varda's work is reactionary: in her rejection of culture and her placement of women outside history her films mark a retrograde step in women's cinema. (29)

Varda herself now talks about the film as one which operates as entertainment for those who want to see it that way, and as social criticism for those who want to see it that way. In a sense it is possible to see the film as entertainment in a way which foregrounds the contradictions within it: as suggested about Dance Girl Dance by Johnston and Cook; and in the terms raised by Richard Dyer's paper.

The contradictions in Le Bonheur do not "crack open the surface of the film" (30); they have to be read through the film's absences - its lack of tension and, more specifically, its absence of the 'woman's voice', absences which are glossed over and thus seen as 'natural'.

This naturalisation is confirmed by the enclosing of the film within nature - it opens in the spring/summer and closes in the summer/autumn (we don't see anything of winter). There is also in the film the full natural cycle of life - birth, children, family, marriage and death - and its continuation is assured by the replacing of the first wife by the mistress, and her acceptance by the children of her as replacement mother. The mistress is shown to be quite content with

that role, and is equally content in her new one. But the principle point at which the 'woman's voice' can be seen as absent is when the first wife drowns after she has heard from her husband, during a family picnic, that he is having an affair. He assures her that he has enough love for them both and then drifts off to sleep. She wanders off for a walk and we don't see her again except in the scene re-presenting his imagination of how she drowned. The automatic assumption in his mind is that once drowning (either by accident or by intent) she cries out for his help. In other words he does not imagine that she consciously drowned herself; even at this point she is not given a voice.

The 'woman's voice'

Woman is seen as being outside culture/history and inside nature/as-  
ternal, and therefore as not needing to express herself in terms of  
desire which would take her outside nature and allow her independence  
and affectivity. In Le Bonheur woman is situated inside the eternal  
reproduction cycle of marriage, motherhood and family life. Her point  
of view which must not contradict this 'natural' image must be silenced.  
The notion of 'voices' is discussed by Colin McCabe in his article  
'Realism and the Cinema: Notes on some Brechtian Theses' (31):

A classic realist text may be defined as one in  
which there is a hierarchy amongst the discourses  
which compose the text and this hierarchy is  
defined in terms of an empirical notion of truth.  
... No discourse is allowed to speak for itself  
but rather it must be placed in a context which  
will reduce it to a simple explicable content.  
And in the claim that the narrative prose has  
direct access to a final reality we can find the  
claim of the classic realist novel to present us  
with the truths of human nature. ...

Thus then a first definition of the classic realist text -- but  
does this definition carry over into films where it is certainly less  
evident where to locate the dominant discourse? It seems  
to me that it does and in the following fashion. The narrative  
prose achieves its position of dominance because it is in the  
position of knowledge and this function of knowledge is taken up  
in the cinema by the narration of events. Through the knowledge  
we gain from the narrative we can split the discourses of the  
various characters from their situation and compare what is said  
in these discourses with what has been revealed to us through  
narration. The camera shows us what happens -- it tells the truth  
against which we can measure the discourses. A good example of  
this classical realist structure is to be found in Pakula's film *Klute*.  
This film is of particular interest because it was widely praised  
for its realism on its release. Perhaps even more significantly it  
tended to be praised for its realistic presentation of the leading  
woman, Bree (played by Jane Fonda).

In *Klute* the relationship of dominance between discourses is  
peculiarly accentuated by the fact that the film is interspersed  
with fragments of Bree talking to her psychiatrist. This subjective  
discourse can be exactly measured against the reality provided by  
the unfolding of the story. Thus all her talk of independence is por-  
trayed as finally an illusion as we discover, to no great surprise  
but to our immense relief, what she really wants is to settle down  
in the mid-West with John Klute (the detective played by Donald  
Sutherland) and have a family. The final sequence of the film is  
particularly telling in this respect. While Klute and Bree pack their  
bags to leave, the soundtrack records Bree at her last meeting with  
her psychiatrist. Her own estimation of the situation is that it  
most probably won't work but the reality of the image ensures

us that this is the way it will really be. Indeed Bree's monologue is even more interesting – for in relation to the reality of the image it marks a definite advance on her previous statements. She has gained insight through the plot development and like many good heroines of classic realist texts her discourse is more nearly adequate to the truth at the end of the film than at the beginning. But if a progression towards knowledge is what marks Bree, it is possession of knowledge which marks the narrative, the reader of the film and John Klute himself. For Klute is privileged by the narrative as the one character whose discourse is also a discourse of knowledge. Not only is Klute a detective and thus can solve the problem of his friend's disappearance – he is also a man, and a man who because he has not come into contact with the city has not had his virility undermined. And it is as a full-blooded man that he can know not only the truth of the mystery of the murders but also the truth of the woman Bree. Far from being a film which goes any way to portraying a woman liberated from male definition (a common critical response), *Klute* exactly guarantees that the real essence of woman can only be discovered and defined by a man.

This latter point has also been made by Christine Gledhill (33) and Laura Mulvey (34) in terms film noir though the notion of woman as enigma is not specific to this genre, of course: the female character of Jules et Jim\* appears to be at the centre of the film, but note that the title reflects where the centrality of Catherine is situated – in the minds of the two central male characters, she is the Other of their imagination, their idealised fantasy image.

For Jules and Jim Catherine existed first as a work of art, a statue, an ideal vision to which there was, luckily, a true woman to conform. (35)

... Moreau is a sensualist and epicure – she eats, drinks, loves, and, like Edith Piaf, allows herself to be used. This is the side of her nature – gaiety and generosity – that comes through in the first half of Jules et Jim; she even allows herself to become the image of the statue that Jules and Jim carry in their hearts. If she is a fantasy, she is a glorious fantasy ... But in the second half she becomes a force of evil, a projection of man's desire for exclusivity, for possession. She carelessly destroys her own life and two others, and brings the film down around her with the burden of her guilt. (36)\*\*

Molly Haskell correctly points to the idea that something of the character of Catherine seemed for Truffaut to have existed in Jeanne Moreau, but doesn't go on to show that this is an assumption based on the false notion that woman is nature, enigma. In other words having said that Catherine is a fantasy and a projection of man's desire she doesn't point to the contradiction ...

\* François Truffaut 1962

\*\* It is interesting that Truffaut, who originated the term la politique des auteurs and put so much weight on the personal expression of the single auteur, still holds to that view though is aware of the women's movement – "it would be difficult [he says] for him to make Jules et Jim today, since he would feel 'women's lib looking over my shoulder'." Variety (the Hollywood trade paper) 14/1/76.

### Feminist film theory and stereotypes

The task of feminist film theory is to find ways of analysing a text which will recognise the exclusion of the woman's voice and her position within the text as object. And the task is the same whether it concerns a European art film or a Hollywood film.

In other words, precisely because the myth of woman, as Simone de Beauvoir writes, is a various and contradictory one, because it crops up in almost any expression of patriarchal ideology one could mention, and incorporates all the variations, we have to find ways of recognising all its manifestations, and at the same time must take into account the existence of contradiction. This is one of the major reasons for feminists to have taken up Dance Girl Dance - because contradiction can be seen to exist within the text.

Kay and Peary point out in their text on the film (p29) that repetition is one of the major features of myth - a point also taken up by Pam Cook in her essay. In European art cinema one can identify stereotypes which embody repetition of the myth of woman - as enigma, earth mother, mature sexuality, ethereal, neurotic etc - as much as in Hollywood - vamp, chorus girl, goddess, mom, teacher, dumb broad etc. Such iconography (not only of women, of course - it also includes clothes, furniture, objects of the trade like guns, cars etc) is a kind of shorthand. It enabled recognition of basic information with which the audience could recognise the narrative. Having established these basic facts "the conduct of the characters was predetermined accordingly" (37). Pam Cook, though, argues that

The use of female stereotypes, modified only slightly to meet the demands of fashion, has contributed to the propagation of myths of woman which relate primarily to the desires of men. (38)

Thus the complexity of the representation of women in narrative is shaped both by the form and the content, by lighting, framing, by narrative structure and by character interplay. All these elements work to lock woman into the image desired and to gloss over its contradictions.

### Dance Girl Dance

The film utilises some of the genres prevalent during the 30s and their conventions and stereotypes: chorus girls, burlesque, high society comedy, the gold-digger and the potential star.

We must ask what is the ideological function of the genres which Arzner uses in Dance Girl Dance and then how does she use them. Can Judy and Bubbles be separated from their stereotypic roles to be read as 'real' psychologically motivated people as opposed to articulations of the generic conventions which, Johnston and Cook argue, allow Arzner to play on their narrative function? Is the ending of the film a conventional one or an inflection of the convention? Kay and Peary cite the Cinderella story; the fairy story has a particular function of which the female characters are a structural element; can this then be applied to a Hollywood film?

In other words we can see that in Arzner's work Hollywood conventions are employed, but foregrounded and thereby questioned - the basic contradiction of woman as spectacle is foregrounded by the use of those stereotypes which represent it, and which may be momentarily displaced though later recuped. The spectators of the burlesque hall audience pay money to see women act as spectacles; Judy questions that in a moment of anger when her willingness to play the role because of her desire to be a ballet dancer is momentarily knocked off guard and the pressure of being an object of men's desire makes her explode.

In Notes on Women's Cinema, Claire Johnston writes

The conventional view about women working in Hollywood (Arzner, Weber, Lupino etc) is that they had little opportunity for real expression within the dominant sexist ideology; they were token women and little more. (39)

Kay and Peary are also refuting this conventional view in discussing Dance Girl Dance in terms of its importance for the women's movement and its representation of women. But their analysis is one which exchanges heroines for heroes and puts them through the same tests of psychological realism and life-meaningfulness as we have already discussed. Claire Johnston's starting point from her recognition of the conventional view is that

because iconography offers in some ways a greater resistance to the realist characterisations, the mythic qualities of certain stereotypes become far more easily detachable and can be used as a shorthand for referring to an ideological tradition in order to provide a critique of it. (40)

Realist characterisation and realist convention then produce an image which is supposed to be life-like (in other words close enough to life to be recognisable but not so close as to allow contradiction to become evident through the detachability of the stereotype from its realist presentation - the apparent closeness to life glosses the actual artificiality of that presentation). Interestingly the women's movement has seen Hollywood as presenting an unreal image of women though tends not to recognise that it is a structured one. Thus there is a call for realistic portrayals of women, but it is a call which suggests that such a portrayal is a simple matter. The claim is (and of course there is an element of truth in it though like all other truths it is not self-evident and therefore not simply there to be filmed) that women are multi-faceted and that cinema should reflect this. But women's lives are at the same time locked into a negative relationship with patriarchy. It might be argued then that what films need to show is the potential reality of women's lives (the sort of potentiality evidenced perhaps in The Amazing Equal Pay Show and Women of the Rhondda by the London Women's Film Group, and played on in La Fiancée du Pirate by Nelly Kaplan).

Arzner, Johnston and Cook claim, made use of such techniques, of play on stereotypes, genre conventions, narrative reversals etc, and it is this which makes her a pertinent director for the women's movement - not that she reflects something of the 'truth' of women's lives, but that she points up the contradictions.

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Finally, a further difference between the two texts is that Kay and Peary make an assumption that women in 1976 can personally identify with the characters in the film, which could almost be said to be affirmation of the myth of woman as ahistorical; while Johnston and Cook see certain textual strategies which were not, and probably could not have been, evident at the time, but which can be read in the text now and which, therefore, have relevance to the creation of texts by women today. Whether women at the time saw the film as anything bordering on feminism is interesting though irrelevant; certainly Arzner did not consider herself to be a feminist.

## Notes

- 1) Although this paper has been written specifically for the Summer School it reflects work which has been done collectively by Elizabeth Cowie, Christine Gledhill, Angela Martin and Nicky North in other study and teaching contexts.
- 2) Marcia R Lieberman in Images of Women in Fiction: Feminist Perspectives, ed Susan Koppelman Cornillon (Bowling Green University Popular Press, Ohio, 1972).
- 3) Dorothy Arzner's Dance Girl Dance, by Karen Kay and Gerald Peary, in Velvet Light Trap, n10, Fall 1973; The Work of Dorothy Arzner: Towards a Feminist Cinema, ed Claire Johnston (BFI, London, 1974).
- 4) eg the journal Women and Film (from California, USA); Notes on Women's Cinema, ed Claire Johnston (SEFT, 1974 - available with other BFI publications from the BFI, 81 Dean St, London W1V 6AA); From Reverence to Rape, Molly Haskell (Holt, Rinehart and Winston Inc, N.Y., and Penguin, London, 1974); Popcorn Venus, Marjorie Rosen (Coward, McCann & Geoghegan Inc, N.Y., 1973 and Avon Books (paperback), N.Y., 1974).
- 5) Kay and Peary, op cit, p26.
- 6) ibid; the use of 'fantasy' and 'desire' are used in this article, of course, in the more common sense than the specifically psychoanalytic sense.
- 7) Ka and Peary, op cit, p28.
- 8) Don Siegel: American Cinema, Alan Lovell (BFI, 1975).
- 9) ibid, p4.
- 10) Ed Buscombe, citing François Truffaut in 'The Ideas of Authorship' in Screen, v14 n3, Autumn 1973, p76.
- 11) Signs and Meaning in the Cinema, Peter Wollen (Cinema One, Secker & Warburg, London, revd edn 1972) p81.
- 12) Howard Hawks, Robin Wood (Cinema One, Secker & Warburg, London, 1968) p42.
- 13) ibid, p54.
- 14) see Laura Mulvey 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema' in Screen, v16 n3, Autumn 1975, pp11-17.
- 15) Claude Chabrol, 'Little Themes' in The New Wave, ed Peter Graham (Cinema One, Secker and Warburg, 1968) p73.
- 16) ibid, pp73-4.
- 17) "films which seem at first sight to belong firmly within the ideology and to be completely under its sway, but which turn out to be so only in an ambiguous manner ... An internal criticism is taking place which cracks the film apart at the seams. If one reads the film obliquely, looking for symptoms; if one looks beyond its apparent formal coherence, one can see that it is riddled with cracks ... The ideology thus becomes subordinate to the text." Comolli and Narboni, 'Cinema/Ideology/Criticism' in Screen, v12 n1, Spring 1971, translated from Cahiers du Cinéma, ns216/7, October-November 1969.
- 18) Claire Johnston, The Work of ..., op cit, p3; this use of 'discourse' is not the same as that of Celia Britton's article on La Grande Illusion, but is rather related to Colin McCabe's use of the term - see below pp10-11; in terms of our discussion of authorship though it should be pointed out that this view of certain Hollywood films as containing ideological tensions sometimes leads to their directors being seen as creative individuals in the same way that auteurs had been - this is discussed by Alan Lovell in Don Siegel ..., op cit, ch1.
- 19) Pam Cook, The Work of Dorothy Arzner, op cit, p10.
- 20) ibid, pl1.
- 21) ibid, pl0.
- 22) an un-named woman with a Masters in art history, quoted by Lillian S Robinson and Lise Vogel, 'Modernism and History', in Images of Women in Fiction, op cit.

- 23) Robinson and Vogel, op cit, p286.
- 24) Joanna Russ, 'Why Women Can't Write', in Images of Women in Fiction, op cit, p4.
- 25) A Winters Tale, Shakespeare.
- 26) described by Joanna Russ as the popular view of the life of Dylan Thomas.
- 27) Russ, op cit, p4.
- 28) Roy Armes, French Cinema since 1946: The Personal Style (Zwemmer, London, 1970) p105.
- 29) Claire Johnston, Notes on Women's Cinema, op cit, p30.
- 30) Claire Johnston, The Work of ..., op cit, p3.
- 31) Colin McCabe, 'Realism and the Cinema: Notes on some Brechtian Theses' in Screen, v15 n2, Summer 1974.
- 32) ibid, pp10-11.
- 33) Christine Gledhill, Realist Film Criticism and Hollywood (a paper written for the SEFT Weekend School on Women and Film) p6.
- 34) Laura Mulvey, op cit, p13.
- 35) Molly Haskell, From Reverence to Rape, op cit, pp7-8.
- 36) ibid, p303.
- 37) Erwin Panofsky, quoted by Claire Johnston, Notes ..., op cit, p24.
- 38) Pam Cook, The Work of ..., op cit, p10.
- 39) Claire Johnston, Notes ..., op cit, p25.
- 40) ibid, p25; see also Claire's essay in The Work of ..., op cit, p5.

\*p2 the missing footnote should be:

Here too we can mention language. The term 'man' in academic writing indicates quite correctly that the world is male-defined. But the use of 'cameraman' and 'continuity girl' militate more concretely against women. One of the one hand then women must ask themselves if they want to be implicated in a view of the world defined by the term 'man', but on the other hand, correctly, must insist that the terms when referring to jobs be less sex-specific. The word 'his' was used here because there were no women auteurs, but also because the point of the argument is that women were by implication excluded from affectivity by critical practice, either in terms of creativity or in terms of their place in the text.